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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2893

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UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000680

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KIRF PHUM PGOV SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: THEOLOGICAL TRAINING REMAINS UNDER
TIGHT STATE SUPERVISION

REF: ASHGABAT 322

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Theological training in Turkmenistan takes place at the State University in a department that is part of the History Faculty. The theology professors were trained by Turkish theologians during the post-Soviet era. The admissions process is overseen by the Mufti, and the number of students is determined by the anticipated need for additional imams. According to two university administrators, there is no need for an additional theology institute and no plans to make the Theology Department a separate faculty. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On May 27, Political Officer met with Turkmen State University Rector, Charyyar Tugiyev, and History Faculty Dean, Annageldi Gubayev, to discuss theological training provided at the university, the only institution to offer such training. The rector explained that the university offers studies in 26 specialties. The Theology Department is part of the History Faculty. During the Soviet era, theology studies were not offered in Turkmenistan. Students went to either Tashkent or Saudi Arabia to study theology. None of the imams trained during the Soviet era are currently theology professors, and neither the rector nor the dean could comment on the current locations or role of this older generation of imams. After Turkmenistan's independence, a theology faculty opened in 1995 staffed by professors from Turkey. Six Turkmen theology students were sent to Turkey for graduate studies following completion of their studies in Turkmenistan. Upon their return in 2005, they became the theology faculty and the Turkish professors departed. Tugiyev explained that Turkmenistan and Turkey still maintain contact in the area of theological studies through occasional seminars held in both countries.

¶3. (SBU) There are currently 60 students studying theology, following a five-year course of studies. The admissions process is the following: announcements are published in newspapers notifying potential students about the application deadline. Applicants submit an application and take a university admissions exam. This is followed by personal interviews with the Mufti. About ten students are accepted each year, based on the need for additional imams as

determined by the Mufti. Tugiyev explained that the population is too small to justify the existence of any other theology institutes. There are no plans to separate the Theology Department from the History Faculty. Regarding the curriculum for theology students, the rector said they study subjects in addition to theology such as philosophy and Turkmen history. Neither he nor the dean could give specifics about the theology curriculum. Many of the incoming theology students have studied Arabic and they have intensive Arabic training during their first year at the university.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: It was unfortunate that the meeting did not include someone who actually teaches theology and is familiar with the curriculum for theology students. While the rector and dean were welcoming, they could offer scant information about the theology program. Perhaps that was their intention. Following his various comments, the rector would frequently look to the MFA official in attendance, as if to check whether he'd said the right thing. END COMMENT.
MILES